

Goyer-Lee House  
690 East Adams Avenue  
Memphis  
Shelby County  
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-171

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C.

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15-

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GOYER-LEE HOUSE

HABS No. TN-171

Location: 690 E. Adams Avenue, Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee.

Latitude: 35° 08' 41"

Longitude: 90° 02' 15"

Present Owner: Association for the Preservation of Tennessee Antiquities,  
680 E. Adams Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee.

Present Occupant: Vacant; undergoing restoration.

Significance: Construction of this house, more commonly referred to as the Lee House, spanned three decades. Begun in 1848, it was enlarged in 1853 and 1873 by Charles Wesley Goyer. With the last extension, the prosperous merchant added the Victorian front section with its ponderous tower, bracketed cornices and elaborate details. The architects for the final addition were Edward C. Jones and Mathias H. Baldwin. The house was purchased in 1890 by Captain James Lee, Jr., son of the founder of the extensive Lee Line of river steamers and packets.

## PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: 1848, 1853 and 1873. The original section (1848) is situated in the back of the house. The central section, added in 1853, was used to accommodate Charles Wesley Goyer's family of ten children. The last addition (1873) is the present three-story front section with a tower.
2. Architects: Edward Culliett Jones (1822-1902) and Mathias Harvey Baldwin (1827-1891) were the architects for the 1873 enlargement of the house which gave it the character it now possesses. Previous architects are unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following chain of title may be established from the Register of Deeds of Shelby County.

1839 Deed January 25, 1839 recorded January 25, 1839 in  
Book G page 437  
W. D. Dabney  
to  
Seth Wheatley

- 1848 Deed June 29, 1848 recorded November 24, 1848 in  
Book 1 page 115  
Seth Wheatley  
to  
William Harsson
- 1852 Deed January 10, 1852 recorded March 3, 1852 in  
Book 9 page 350  
William Harsson  
to  
Charles Wesley Goyer
- 1890 Deed July 8, 1890 recorded July 15, 1890 in  
Book 203 page 63  
Robert Goyer and Sallie G. Goyer (wife) (heirs of  
Charles Wesley Goyer)  
to  
Rowena Lee (wife of James Lee, Jr.)
- 1929 Deed May 15, 1929 recorded May 15, 1929 in  
Book 1256 page 459  
Rosa Lee (daughter of Rowena Lee)  
to  
City of Memphis
- 1961 Lease October 24, 1961 recorded November 6, 1961 in  
Lease Book 64 page 521 (\$1.00 per year)  
City of Memphis  
to  
Memphis Chapter, Association for the Preservation of  
Tennessee Antiquities

4. Alterations and additions: Except for having been built in three rather distinct segments, the main alteration has been the removal (since 1912) of an iron cupola railing. (Other changes have not been recorded at the time of this survey).

- B. Historical Context: William Harsson, who owned the property from 1848 to 1852, was a Memphis lumberman. Charles Wesley Goyer, his son-in-law who purchased the property from him, was a leading merchant.

In 1890 the house was purchased by Captain and Mrs. James Lee, Jr., who had ten children. Lee was a former lawyer who in 1877 joined his father's steam packet boat firm. The Lee Line steamers were known from St. Louis to New Orleans; thirty-six different steamboats were operated by the firm from 1862 to 1926. Many of these were named for members of the family; one, the Stacker Lee (named for Captain James Lee Jr.'s brother) provided the name for a Negro badman memorialized in one of the most widely known ballads of American origin.

The Goyer-Lee House was for thirty years the home of the James Lee Memorial Academy of Art, predecessor of the Memphis Academy of Arts now located in Overton Park.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Although the house is composed of three different sections, it is a good example of a late mid-19th century mansion built by a well-to-do family. The most elaborate interior is found in the front and last section of the house, and includes plaster trim, plaster ceiling medallions, shaped moldings and marble mantels.
2. Condition of fabric: Good structural condition but neglected; some deterioration; the building is undergoing restoration at this time.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 107' north-south x 52' east-west at extremities (the main entrance faces south). There are three stories in the front portion and two in the rear. The building is a long and narrow rectangle with a five-sided room projection on the center of the east side (first and second floors). There is a one-story rectangular alcove projection on the west side. Porch sections are found on the east, south and west sides.
2. Foundations: Brick.
3. Walls: The brick construction of the rear portions of the house are exposed. On the front portion the brick is covered with 4" sandstone veneer in the most prominent areas and with stucco in other places. The tower and the room projection have the sandstone which is coursed into large blocks. The stucco of the building walls is also troweled to resemble the sandstone coursing. The walls are painted white; the sandstone is natural color.
4. Structural system: The building is of bearing wall construction with wood joists for floors and wood framing for the roof.
5. Porches, stoop: There is a wood L-shaped porch at the southwest corner of the house. It wraps around the building from the entrance tower to the alcove projection on the west side. More porches are found on the east side of the house. One is located to the south of the room projection, the other to the north. All of the porches have wood box columns with modified arches, wood

moldings and cast-iron work. They also have cut stone bases with openings in the walls. The stairs to all these porches are of stone. For the front porch there are seven risers with 12" treads; for the side porches there are six risers with 12" treads.

There is a concrete stoop on the west side of the house, in the original section. It has five risers with 12" treads.

6. Chimneys: There are seven chimneys on the house. Two chimneys are placed symmetrically on the west side of the southern block of the building. They stand 9' high and measure 3'-2" x 1'-5". The third chimney is situated at the north end of this portion of the building. It stands 7' (2'-10" x 1'-10") high. The fourth chimney is situated at the north end of the east room projection, and measures 1'-10" x 2'-10" x 10'. The fifth chimney is situated at the north side of the center portion and straddles the parapet at the gable end. The sixth and seventh chimneys are located at the north end of the building. The one at the west side has been cut down but the one on the east measures 1'-5" x 3'-7" and stands 5'-7" high. All chimneys are of brick with the one on the east room projection being covered with stucco. All chimneys are capped with a 3-1/2" stone slab.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance doorway is located under the entry tower on the south side of the building. It is an elaborate piece of work with double doors topped with a semicircular transom. The transom and the doors have leaded clear glass panels with the glass pieces having beveled edges. The doors measure 2'-3-1/2" x 8'-6" x 2-1/2" each, while the entire composition measures 4'-7" x 12'-4". There is a door around the corner to the east which gives access from the east porch to the entrance hall. It measures 3'-0" x 8'-5" x 1 3/4" with a glass panel over two wood panels. It is topped with a glass transom. Another door opens onto this porch. It is located on the east room projection's south wall and it measures 2'-10-1/2" x 9'-1" x 1 3/4" with a glass panel over two wood panels. It is topped with a semicircular transom. Two doors open onto the rear porch on the east side of the house. While the door to the right is newer, they were probably of the same composition. Both measure 2'-11" x 7'-9" x 1 3/4" with glass transoms over. The older door to the left has a glass panel over an elaborate wood panel. The one to the right has six glass lights over two panels. The door on the west side of the house is located about 28' from the north end. It is 2'-11" x 7'-9" x 1 3/4" and has two long panels over two short ones and a two-light transom.

- b. Windows: All windows unless noted are of wood and are double-hung. All arched windows are designated; the rest are flat-headed. The windows have either one pane of glass per double-hung sash (1/1) or two per sash (2/2).

Tower windows: Second floor: 3'-0" x 10'-1" (1/1), arched; Third floor: 2'-10-1/2" x 7'-7" (1/1), arched, those on the east and west sides have been covered on the inside with sheetrock; Fourth floor: 2'-10" x 8'-8-1/4", arched (1/1).

South facade (front): The first floor windows in the porch are 2'-11" x 10'-7-1/2" (1/1) with stone cornices. The second floor windows are 3'-1" x 7'-11" (1/1). The third floor windows are arched and measure 2'-10" x 6'-0" (1/1). The windows are stacked.

East facade (right side): All windows on the room projection (the center ones are blocked in because of a partition inserted in the room) are 2'-10" x 9'-3" with arched heads (1/1). The windows at the rear (older) portion of the house, first floor, are 2'-11" x 6'-7" (2/2). All second floor windows in the front, middle and rear portions have 2/2 lights. Two windows on the third floor have arched heads. The one to the south is 2'-10" x 6'-0" while the one to the north is 2'-10" x 5'-0". Both are 2/2.

West facade (left side): On the first floor, the windows in the alcove projection are arched and have 1/1 lights. The windows in the middle portion are 2'-11" x 8'-8" with 1/1 and 2/2 lights. The windows to the older rear portion are 2'-11" x 6'-7" with 2/2 lights. There is a fixed panel window adjacent to the door; it measures 5'-5" wide x 4'-2" high with ten glass lights. On the second floor, the windows in the front portion are 2'-11" x 7'-11" (2/2); in the center portion they are 2'-11" x 7'-9-1/2" (2/2); at the rear they are 2'-11" x 6'-6" (2/2). On the third floor there are two arched windows; the one to the north has been replaced with a door to the fire escape. The windows measure 2'-10" x 7'-0" (2/2).

North facade (rear): The first floor windows at the rear of the house are similar to the other first floor windows of the oldest part of the house. On the second level two standard windows have been replaced with a 10 foot wide steel factory sash window. On the third floor of the front portion (rear wall) there are two double casement windows, each measuring 2'-9" wide x 2'-7" high.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: There is a hip roof on the front portion of the house; it has a north/south ridge of about 6', and is covered with raised seam sheet metal painted red. The roof of the middle portion is gabled with the south gable end running against the third story of the front portion. The north gable end is exposed (1/2 brick, 1/2 horizontal siding). The covering is raised seam sheet metal. The roof of the rear portion is flat with a slight slope to the north end. It is covered with black rolled asphalt roofing. The porch roofs are of black rolled asphalt.
- b. Cornice, eaves: There is a sheet metal box cornice (15" deep) supported by sheet metal brackets 12" wide and 6-1/2' or 12-1/2' long. Over the third floor windows, the cornice breaks upward to form an incomplete pediment (without base). The rear portions of the house have parapets.
- c. Tower: The tower is at the southeast corner of the building, over the entrance. It rises 60' above grade to the top of the roof. The tower roof is a mansard type, covered with cut slate shingles of different shapes. Its flat top is of red painted sheet metal.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: There is a partial basement extending south from the north end about half the length of the building. Specific chambers are not set out, but walls correspond to major walls above.
- b. First floor: Entrance to the house is from the south and through the tower into a 11'-11" x 35'-3" entrance/stairhall containing a stairway to the second level along its east wall. To the west of the hall is a large parlor (18' x 36') having twin fireplaces along the west wall. This room opens to a dining room on the north end which also has a fireplace at the west wall. To the east of the hall is a five-sided room projection which has a fireplace at the north end and windows in the projecting walls. To the north of these major rooms are a series of spaces, the original functions of which are not clear. They are for the most part the result of later building additions which altered the shapes. At the north end of the hall is a room which was originally an exterior space. At the far north end of the house is the oldest part. The two chambers there (approx. 13' x 14' each) have been remodeled as a part of the new apartment which was created at that end.

- c. Second floor: The second floor corresponds to the first in many ways. However the stairhall is smaller (12' x 26') and a room extends into the tower. There is a large room to the west of the stairhall which was probably two rooms of 18' x 18' and 17' x 18'. There are two fireplaces on the west wall of this large room. The room to the north of this room also has a fireplace on the west wall. The room measures 16'-1" x 17'-1". The remainder of the second floor is similar to the first with the middle section somewhat confused in the room layout. Two former rooms at the north end of the house have been united to form one large room and was used as a studio as evidenced by the large north window inserted. The north end has a floor level 32" below the main floor level and the center rooms lie 5" below.
  - d. Third floor: The stairhall at the third floor (12' x 35') provides access to a small tower room and to the large room to the west (18' x 36'). The latter corresponds to the large rooms below. This room has two fireplaces along the west wall.
  - e. Fourth floor: There is only one room to the fourth floor. It is a 9' x 9' tower room, the access to which is via a stairway in the tower.
2. Stairways: An open stairway passes from the first to third floor along the east wall of the stairhall. It has a molded wood handrail and turned balusters, and its stringers have cut wood scroll designs. The stairway to the second floor has twenty-five risers of 6 3/4" (treads of 12-1/2", with 1-1/4" nosing). They are 3'-7" wide and are in a straight run. The stairway to the third floor has twenty-four risers of 7 1/4" (treads of 11", with 1-1/4" nosing). There is a single riser and landing, then a straight run of twenty-three risers along the wall. These stairs are 3'-3" wide.

A second stairway to the second floor is found at the rear of the building. It has seventeen risers (varies from 7" to 8") with 11-1/2" treads having 1" nosing, up to a level which lies 2'-10" below the second floor level. The stairway almost makes a complete loop to the left with three risers up to a landing followed by fourteen risers (straight and winders) with two turns to the left.

A stairway connects the third floor to the tower. It has eighteen risers (8") with 9-1/2" treads having 1-1/4" nosing. They make two turns to the right as they wind along the north, east and south sides of the tower.



A small stairway connects the intermediate level with the main second level and it lies within the same room as the rear stairway. There are four risers of 8" (12'1/2" treads). There are some steps between two floor levels of the second floor as the center portion is about 5" lower than the front block.

The stairs to the basement are located under the rear stairs to the second floor. They are set against the west wall, are 40" wide, with twelve risers of about 8-1/2" (9-1/2" treads with 1" nosing).

3. Flooring: Wood flooring is used throughout the upper portions of the house. The basement has concrete slab floors, some of which are poured atop a brick floor. On the first floor 1-1/2" and 2-1/2" oak tongue-and-groove boards are used. In the stairhall there is an inlaid border pattern near the front door. The floors in the rear portions of the house are of 3-1/2" tongue-and-groove boards. On the second floor the stairhall floor is of 1-1/2" boards; most of the other rooms have 4" boards although some have boards varying from 4-1/2" to 7". On the third floor 3" and 4" boards are used. On the fourth floor 4" boards are used.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Most of the building has walls and ceilings of wood lath and plaster. On the first floor the stairhall has a wainscot of boards in an open diamond pattern set against the plaster wall. In the dining room there is a wood paneled wainscot. The walls of the rear portions are of exposed brick and horizontal board siding (where the spaces were once exposed to the exterior) and wood paneling. Other areas of the building have the same combinations of materials. The basement walls are of exposed brick, unpainted. (See also Decorative features and trim on page 9).
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The doors on the first floor are generally about 3' wide and over 8' high. The doors to the parlor from the stairhall have been removed. They were 3'-1" x 8'-3-1/2" x 1 3/4" and were topped with a 2'-2" high transom. The door probably contained six wood panels, the most common type in the house. There is a 9" molding framing the opening. The door between the east room projection and the hallway is 2'-11-1/2" x 8'-9" x 1 3/4" with one large panel (probably originally glazed) over two smaller wood panels. The door at the rear of the hall is 3'-1" x 8'-3" x 1 3/4" with six wood panels; it is topped with a transom. A door on the east side of the dining room is 3'-1" x 8'-0" x 1 3/4" with six panels and is also topped with a transom. There is also a window on this wall, indicating an eastern exposure

to this room. Between the parlor and the dining room is an 11'-1" wide x 10'-5" high open archway. The form is repeated at the north end of the dining room.

Other doors on the first floor are similar to the above mentioned or somewhat smaller. The latter are usually newer doors.

Doors on the second floor vary in width from 2'-6" to 3'-1" and in height from 6'-5-1/2" to 7'-11". Most doors have four to six panels of wood, although there are some glass panels. The doors which open off the stairhall are generally of the same six-panel design, 3'-1/2" x 7'-5" x 1 3/4". The exception is the door to the east room projection which measures 2'-9-1/2" x 7'-5-1/2" x 1 5/8" and has four panels. The doors in the rear portions of the building exhibit a wide variety of designs and sizes. Most of the doors have four panels; there is one with two vertical panels of glass over two wood panels and one with four glass lights over two panels.

There are two doorways connecting the stairhall with the major room on the third floor. One of the doors is removed. The remaining door is in the wall between the stairhall and the tower room. These wood doors measure 3'-0" x 7'-4-1/2" x 1 3/4" and have four wood panels.

- b. Windows: (Not recorded).
6. Decorative features and trim: The house abounds with wood moldings, the most elaborate of which are found on the first floor. The least elaborate is on the second floor. The shaped moldings vary in size from 5" to 10". There are base moldings in all rooms, dados in the first floor entry hall, and cast plaster cornice moldings in the main floor rooms. In some rooms there are built-in closets and cabinets which have wood paneling. These occur mostly in the rear portions of the building and not in the main rooms. There are cast plaster medallions on the main parlor ceiling, and evidence of a painted panel on the ceiling of the dining room. The most elaborate single feature is the front door, with its leaded beveled glass windows.

There are a variety of fireplace mantels in the house. On the first floor there is a pair of marble manteled fireplaces on the west wall of the parlor. The hearths are also of marble. In the dining room there is a fireplace with a wood hearth and tile hearth. In the east room projection the fireplace has a plaster mantel with cast-iron trim and a hearth of brick. The fireplaces in the first floor rear rooms have been covered over. On the second floor the large room has two fireplaces, one with a wood

mantel and stone hearth, the other with a marble and cast-iron mantel and stone hearth. The room to the north of this room has a fireplace, the hearth of which has been removed. Two fireplaces against the north wall of the rear portion have cast-iron mantels with stone hearths. On the third floor the main chamber has two fireplaces with cast-iron mantels and stone hearths.

7. Hardware: Standard brass hardware is used throughout the house. The door plates and knobs are of brass, some in glass. Plain 4"-5" butt hinges are used.
8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating, ventilation: There is a gas furnace in the basement which supplied steam or hot water to the radiators (removed). This system is from a later date.

There are ventilation ports on the bases in the front section of the house.
  - b. Lighting: Electric lighting has been added.
  - c. Plumbing: Plumbing fixtures have been added and changed as the function of the building changed.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house is situated on the northwest corner of the intersection of East Adams and Orleans Avenues. Its principal facade faces south toward East Adams. At the extreme eastern end of that portion of East Adams known as "Victorian Village," the house is located in a changing area. It is no longer a totally residential neighborhood although large scale housing projects are being built in the vicinity. To the west of the house is the Fontaine House. Together these structures compose the James Lee Memorial.
2. Landscaping: The landscaping has been somewhat altered in time. To the south and east are small grassed areas on the raised lawn encompassed by a stone retaining wall. To the west is a formal garden of recent years. To the north is a driveway and beyond that is an undeveloped portion of the site.
3. Outbuilding: To the northwest of the house is a stable structure which is a part of the Fontaine House and thus associated with the James Lee Memorial and the Goyer-Lee House. This is a brick structure.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views: There are different photographs of the Goyer-Lee House in the 1905 and the 1912 editions of Art Work of Memphis, Tennessee (Chicago: The Gravure Illustration Co.) Both show the cupola railing, subsequently removed.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Property records. Register of Deeds of Shelby County. (No address given).

2. Secondary and published sources:

Newspaper articles:

Coppock, Paul R. "They Left Their Architectural Mark on Memphis," Commercial Appeal (April 2, 1972).

"Fifty Years Have Gone By Since Captain Lee Died," Memphis Press Scimitar (January 13, 1939).

Hughes, Mrs. T. P., Jr. "Victorian Village Vignettes: The Lee House" (October, 1970).

\_\_\_\_\_. "Two Master Architects of Early Memphis: Edward Culliat Jones, 1822-1902, and Mathias Harvey Baldwin. 1827-1891" (February 4, 1971).

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Summer 1972

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Summer 1972

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Summer 1985

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This 1972 project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Tennessee Historical Commission and the West Tennessee Historical Society. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed by Robert C. Giebner (University of Arizona), project supervisor, and Richard H. Hulan, project historian (Nashville), with architects James D. Skelton (University of Illinois) and Mark D. Frederickson (University of Arizona) and student architects Darrell K. Pattison (University of Cincinnati) and John P. Vergos (University of Tennessee) at the Memphis, Tennessee field office on the campus of Memphis State University.

Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, took the photographs of the building in 1974.

The written data was edited in the Summer of 1985 by Susan McCown, HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, for transmittal to the Library of Congress.

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